

## Legitimation of Linguistic Hegemony Through Language in Education Policy in Nepal: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

The constitutional provision of equal right to all languages as a medium of instruction claims that linguistic justice over all the languages has been maintained in Nepalese Education system. However, this 'positive self-representation' of the constitution and the government seem to implicitly marginalize the 'other languages' through legitimation of domination of powerful languages such as, English and Nepali. Based on this issue, this paper critically analyzes the discourse of Language in Education Policy (a part of National Education Policy 2019) in order to examine how hegemony of dominant languages such as, English and Nepali over other minority languages is legitimized through language in Education Policy in the context of Nepal. Critically analyzing the discourse of language in education policy of Nepal through the lens of ideology, power and double voicedness, the paper reveals that even though Nepalese language in education policy seems to adopt mother tongue-based multilingual education policy, hegemony of two dominant languages (English and Nepali) is still prevalent. The hegemony of these dominant languages is legitimized, reinforced and maintained by the nation through language in education policies.

**Keywords:** ideology, power, double-voicedness, language in education policy, hegemony

### Introduction

Linguistic hegemony is a contested discourse in the current multilingual world. Even though people with some ideologies try to maintain linguistic homogeneity and 'social status quo' (van Dijk, 1997) supporting linguistic hegemony, some scholars such as Skutnabb-Kangas and Philipson (2010) argue that linguistic hegemony and homogeneity are triggering into the 'linguistic genocide' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2005) and challenging the linguistic human right. According to Block (2010), globalization, linguistic capitalism, socio-economic-political ideologies and neoliberalism are the

factors that maintain linguistic hegemony throughout the world. However, Billig (1995) argues that creation of a linguistic hegemony often involves the national hegemony. National hegemony legitimizes hegemony of a particular language over other minority language which leads to the linguistic homogenization. He further argues that the nation tries to legitimize the dominant language by giving status of official national languages suppressing the rival or minority languages. In the process of creating linguistic hegemony, as Pennycook (2002), explicates, government and its authorized bodies (governmentality) legitimize the power of dominant language through the language policies of the nation. Supporting Pennycook (2002) and Bourdieu (1991), Blackledge (2005) assert that the nation involves in legitimation of dominant languages through language planning, standardization and educational policies. As linguistic hegemony and its legitimation is a global phenomenon, Phyak (2021) reveals that legitimation of linguistic hegemony of English and/or Nepali language over other minority languages is explicitly prevalent in Nepalese National Education policy. He argues that the constitutional right of Nepali communities to preserve and promote their indigenous languages has been violated by the influence of English and Nepali languages through the language in education policies. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks and reviewing the language in education policies, this paper critically analyzes the discourse of Language Policy in Education (mentioned in National Education Policy, 2019) to examine the legitimation of linguistic hegemony through the lens of ideology, power and double voicedness.

### **Statement of Problem**

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) has explicitly given the right to use all languages of the nation as medium of instruction (Article, 31). This provision claims that linguistic justice over the languages has been maintained. However, this 'positive self-representation' (Fairclough, 2003) of the constitution and government implicitly marginalizes the 'other languages' through legitimation of domination of powerful languages such as, English and Nepali. Through language policies, as Blackledge (2005) argues, the government gets social control which allows the nation to define 'who is in' and 'who is out'. This ideology of the government to view the relationship between language and the nation ignores linguistic diversity. This ideological orientation is also prevalent as a problem in language in education policy in the context of Nepal as well.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the discourse of Language in Education Policy (mentioned in National Education Policy 2019) in order to examine how hegemony of dominant languages such as, English and Nepali over other minority languages is legitimized through language in Education Policy in the context of Nepal.

**Research Questions**

Aligning with the purpose, the paper basically addresses the following questions:

- What is hegemony and how is it linked with language, nation, policies and education?
- What is the current provision of language policy in National Education Policy 2019?
- How is linguistic hegemony and homogeneity reflected in language policy in education?
- How do ideologies, power, and double voicedness contribute to legitimize linguistic hegemony in language policy in education in Nepal?
- What can be the consequences of linguistic hegemony in linguistic diversity and linguistic human right?

**Literature Review****Theoretical Framework**

This section discusses the major theoretical frameworks used to critically analyze the discourse of Language in Education Policy of Nepal (2019). The paper basically uses three broad constructs: power, ideology and double voicedness as theoretical framework for the paper and links hegemony and legitimization of discriminatory discourses with these constructs. Additionally, the paper reviews language in education policies from past to present.

Discourse of linguistic hegemony is contested phenomenon because it is connected to and influenced by power and ideology. Power and ideologies are socially and politically situated and contextually reconstructed, therefore discursive and contested. Bourdieu (2000) argues that discourse is endowed with “symbolic power, and is the more effective when supported in law, which is the objectification of the dominant, legitimate vision of the world, guaranteed by the State” (p. 186). For examples, the legal authority of the state legitimizes the discourse through the formulation of language policies. These policies are the examples in which symbolic power of the state is

reflected, which is legitimate only because the people (mis)recognize it as legitimate. Similarly, van Dijk (1997) views, “power abuse, ideology, dominance and inequality are enacted reproduced and resisted by the text and talk in the social and political context” (p. 352). Similarly, Foucault (1995) considers power as 'pervasive force and symmetrical relations' that is dominant over the whole society is not in the hands of one special group or another. However, Fairclough (1995) believes that relations of power are asymmetrical unequal and empowering that belong to a special class or group. He further argues that study of language in social context can propound ideas about language and power; power and ideology of powerful people in the social context determine the standard of the language. Similarly, Foucault (1972) views that discourses "systematically form the objects about which they speak," (p, 8) shaping grids and hierarchies for the institutional categorization and treatment of people. According to Blackledge (2005), the more legitimate voice of the state is able to deal with and dismiss the voices which previously contested the ideological battleground in double voiced discourse.

Bakhtin (1984) argues that the government recontextualizes the negotiable, contested and discursive discourses to legitimize them using political ideology, rhetoric of law, media and using 'double voiced discourse' (Bakhtin, 1986). Taking advantage of the ambiguity, political struggle, as Bourdieu (2000) reveals, continues to impose the legitimate vision of the social world. Through this imposition, Blackledge (2005) argues that not only the politics but also the powerful institutions such as the media and education construct the legitimate world. Moreover, the institution of the state, and its law-making authority convert unofficial into official, and the illegitimate into legitimate. The major motive of the state using double voiced discourse is to legitimize discriminatory discourse taking the voices of opponents into account. However, Blackledge (2005) argues that the double voiced discourses create an ambiguity in understanding the motives. Even though there is ambiguity in double voiced discourse, it allows speculation that they include voices of all the discourses.

According to Blackledge (2005), “ideologies that appear to discriminate against languages often discriminate against the speakers of those languages difference” (p. vii). This notion implies that powerful ideologies which value some languages and varieties contribute to the production and reproduction of social difference creating linguistic hegemony. The scholars such as Skutnabb-Kangas and Philipson (2010) argue that

linguistic hegemony that leads to homogeneity triggers to 'linguistic genocide' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2005) and challenges the linguistic human right. Similarly, van Dijk (2001) emphasizes the role of power and ideology in critical discourse analysis. He argues that CDA is political in its orientation interdisciplinary in its scholarship and diverse in its focus. He further establishes the link between language and national identity through language policy, planning, and standardization practices which legitimize particular language varieties and link them to specific identities. Such practices, as May (2001 cited in Blackledge, 2005) asserts, continue to be a common feature of modern nation-state policy which suppress minority languages. Similarly, Bourdieu (1991) opines that the legislation keeps out those who either refuse, or are unable, to abide by the rules of the dominant group. However, Gramsci (1971) argues that state domination over a language cannot be sustained over time without the consent of the polity through ideological persuasion; that is, through hegemony.

Billig (1995) argues that the creation of a national hegemony often involves a hegemony of language. Both national hegemony and hegemony of a particular language over other minority language led to the linguistic homogenization through legitimization. However, Blackledge (2005) argues that legitimation through inscription in law of apparently common-sense consensus is far from straightforward. Moreover, legislative discourse sharply senses other discourses which have preceded it on the same subject, and deals with them by transforming them in a process of recontextualization. This transformation may occur through omission of particular arguments from the eventual legislation, or through the simple repetition of particular arguments. Similarly, Bourdieu (1991) views that the official language is bound by the state, both in its genesis (origin) and its social uses. He further says, "it is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for constitution of a unified linguistic market, dominated by the official language" (p. 42). However, Blackledge (2005) argues that not only the politics but also the powerful institutions such as the media and education construct the legitimate world. Moreover, the institution of the State, and its law-making authority convert unofficial into official, and the illegitimate into legitimate.

### **Language in Education Policy in Nepal**

Officially, Nepal adopted a 'one-nation-one-language' (NNEPC, 1956) policy until

the 1990s to build strong Nepali monolingual nationalism by delegitimizing its linguistic and cultural diversity (Awasthi, 2008). After restoration of democracy in 1990, Nepal has been recognized as multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural country. The Interim Constitutions of Nepal 2006, and Constitution of Nepal 2015 recognized all languages spoken within the country as 'language of nation' and Nepali as the 'national language'. The constitution of Nepal 2015 also guaranteed the right to use all languages of the nation as medium of instruction (Article, 31). On the basis of this constitutional provision, government of Nepal has formulated multilingual education policy in which Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) education is given priority at basic level of education (class 1 to 3) and Trilingual Education Policy (NCF, 2017) which envisions providing education in mother tongue, Nepali and English or any other foreign languages. All these efforts made for the sake of multilingual education (MLE) policy in Nepal imagine a multilingual Nepali public sphere by creating and promoting a multilingual policy in government offices, schools and other spaces. However, Phyak (2021) argues that this multilingual imagining is hardly observed in public spheres, particularly in education, where the discourses on language policies reproduce what Tupas (2015) terms as 'inequalities of multilingualism'. He further argues that discourse of multilingual education unquestionably accepts the hegemony of English and Nepali at the expense of minoritized languages used by diverse communities across the country which is increasingly countering spirit of multilingualism and creating a new form of linguistic injustice. Even though, language policies formulated at different periods in Nepal recognize the importance of multilingualism, researches show that government and related institutions to language policy and implementation seem to legitimize the dominant languages.

### **Methodology**

This paper uses critical discourse analysis method for analyzing the discourse of Language Policy in Education (mentioned in National Education Policy, 2019). The paper primarily analyzes the discourse of Language Policy in Education 2019 from policy no. 10.8 to 10.9.4. While critically analyzing the discourse, the paper basically uses three broad constructs: power, ideology and double voicedness as theoretical framework for the paper and links hegemony and legitimization of discriminatory discourses with these

constructs. Additionally, the paper reviews language in education policies from past to present.

### Discussion

Nepal has been officially recognized as multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural country by the Constitution of Nepal, 1990 and this recognition continued in Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2006. Similarly, The Constitution of Nepal (2015) has explicitly given the right to use all languages of the nation as medium of instruction (Article, 31). On the basis of this constitutional provision, National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2017 and National Education Policy (NEP), 2019 formulated mother tongue-based multilingual/ trilingual language in education Policy. Regarding the language in education policy, National Education Policy in policy no. 10.8 mentions:

*Provision to manage mother tongue-based multilingual education in addition to mother tongue, Nepali and English language as medium of instruction, according to the linguistic diversity of Nepal, children's interests and needs. (p. 18)*

The policy states that mother tongue-based multilingual education is the spirit of the policy which claims that it will address the linguistic diversity, need and interest of the learners. However, Nepali and English language are still seen to be integral part of medium of instruction. The 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 2000) of English and Nepali language is still hidden. Through that power, government has legitimized the hegemony of English and Nepali language over other minority language (Blackledge, 2005).

Similarly, National Education Policy (NEP) 2019 shows positive-self representation for improving education through localizing the subjects such as, mathematics, English social, vocational and self-reliance. Policy no. 10.8.5 states:

*Local levels and schools will be empowered for improving the teaching and learning process by localizing in Mathematics, English language, social, vocational and self-reliance subjects. (p. 19)*

Here, the term 'localizing' implies using the local language (mother tongue) of the learners, using the locally available resources and connecting the content with the local context. Thus policy in itself seems to address the demand of MTB-MLE. This implication is further supported by *policy no. 10.8.2 which states:*

*Mobilizing provincial and local stakeholders and experts, mother tongue-based*

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*textbooks and other materials (including electronic materials) will be prepared, printed, distributed, and evaluated. (p. 19)*

This policy shows that for localization of teaching and learning different levels of stakeholders (local and provincial) will be responsible for managing the relevant local teaching and learning materials. It sees that the policy is, to some extent, favourable to implement MTB-MLE. However, this positive self-representation is contradicted in policy no. 10.8.1. the policy mentions:

*Compulsory Nepali language at the basic level as well as the mother tongue of the concerned student will be the medium of instruction. In addition, provision will be made to teach mathematics and science subjects in English language as well. (p. 19)*

The discourse of this policy seems to be 'double voiced' (Bourdieu, 2000) in sense that even though the policy has 'positive self-representation' (Fairclough, 2003) in allowing mother tongue as a medium of instruction, the phrase, 'as well as mother tongue' creates ambiguity in understanding the intention of the policy or state. Again, the hegemony of English and Nepali languages is explicitly reflected through the policy. For example, Nepali language is represented as 'compulsory' which is determined by the 'power' and mathematics and science which are supposed to be superior subject than the others will be taught in English. Here power of subjects incorporates with power to legitimize English through language policy. Similarly, in policy 10.8.2 and 10.8.5 there is the clear statement that mother tongue education is due priority and provisions are made for localizing the courses. However, the same provision is recontextualized in policy no. 10.8.1 and English and Nepali languages are 'systematically' (Foucault, 1972) legitimized and hegemony of such dominant language is maintained (Bakhtin, 1986). This ideology of government to legitimize dominant languages puts mother tongues of minority groups into extinction (Skutnaab-Kangas, 2005).

Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) policy seems to be contradictory in terms of perceiving languages in education. On the one hand, MTB-MLE claims to promote mother tongues of the learners, Nepali language as MOI is given special priority, on the other hand. As an example, policy no 10.8.4 mentions:

*Promoting Nepali language teaching, subjects related to Nepali basic arts, culture and social studies will be taught in Nepali language but multilingual teaching method based on mother tongue will be encouraged in multilingual classrooms. (p. 19)*



In this policy, the phrase 'promoting Nepali language' and 'teaching arts, culture and social studies subjects in Nepali' reflects that hegemony of Nepali language is maintained and therefore legitimized through policy (van Dijk, 1997). Even though policy no. 10.8.3 mentions “arrangements will be made by the local level government to preserve, develop the script, literature and culture and teach the mother tongue of the place” (p. 19), promoting Nepali language and teaching major subjects in Nepali, reflects the discourse of the policy as 'double voiced' (Bourdieu, 2000) and discriminatory. Similarly, 'using mother tongue in multilingual classrooms' can be seen as just an option. Here the policy is promoting Nepali and English as dominant language taking advantage of the phrase 'mother tongue in multilingual classrooms. This ideology of the state is guided by the 'national hegemony' (hegemony of Nepali and English) of maintaining the power of official languages (Billig, 1995).

Positive self-representation (Fairclough, 2003) for MTB-MLE is explicitly seen in language in education policies. For example, policy no. 10.8.6 mentions “in order to preserve and promote mother tongue, due position will be given to mother tongue in school level curriculum and textbooks” (p. 19). The policy gives 'due position' to the preservation and promotion of mother tongue in school curriculum and textbooks. However, meaning of the phrase 'due position' is implicit. Hence, linguistically discriminatory ideology of powerful group groups (Fairclough, 1995) seems to be working in this context. Nevertheless, the language in education policy in NEP tries to involve all levels to implement MTB-MLE through special programmes in mother tongue. For that policy no. 10.8.7 makes provision for:

*the federal, state and local levels to conduct special programs for the development of communication materials or audio-visual materials or educational materials in the mother tongue in Nepal. (p. 19)*

The policy also focusses on MTB-MLE through communication materials and audio-visual materials at different levels. This also shows that local language, along with the culture and identity are equally respected through policy formulation. However, all these attempts made for addressing the multilingual issues in education are countered by the other provisions in the same policy. For example, policy no. 10.9.4 clearly mentions:

*The medium of instruction in all classes of secondary level will be English, Nepali or both languages. (p. 20)*

Even though many of the language in education policies in NEP, 2019 seem to favour multilingualism, position of English and Nepali language in education is dominant not only up to secondary level but also in higher education in Nepal. As policy no. 10.9.4 clearly mentions that MOI in secondary level will be Nepali and/or English. The role of English language in Nepalese education has always been dominant because the education policy seems to be guided by 'neoliberal ideology' (Block, 2010). Similarly, hegemony of English language is prevalent because hegemony is guided by 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 2000) and neoliberal ideologies. Thus, power and ideologies use double voicedness in the discourse of policy which helps them maintain 'status quo'. Once policy is made, the linguistic hegemony is legitimized. This legitimation keeps the people with dominant language 'in' and people with marginalized languages 'out' (Blackledge, 2005). The ideologies, power, and strategies of state, politics and dominant groups are sidelining implicitly sidelining the minority languages creating what Tupas (2014) terms as 'multilingual inequalities.

Beside some exceptional cases in history, counter arguments against multilingual education policy, that supports legitimation of hegemony of dominant language, are scarce. It is the reality around the world that multilingual education policy offers preservation and promotion of non-dominant, endangered, minority indigenous language along with their cultures through education (Hornberger, 2009). However, Hinton (2016) argues “it is not to claim that bilingual education is of universally high quality. Many bilingual programs are poorly implemented while others need improvement.” (p. 35). Similarly, some monolingual ideologies that believe on 'one nation- one language' can be seen on the report of Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) 1956. The NNEPC (1956) report argues that Nepali should be the national language and only medium of instruction because giving status to other languages can lead to national disintegration and social harmony. The report further argues “in a country where many languages are spoken, it will not be practicable to give the same status to all the languages simultaneously” (p.62). These arguments support monolingualism, accept power and domination of dominant languages and facilitate the state to legitimize the linguistic hegemony. However, I argue that legitimizing hegemony of a dominant language by the nation is equal to legitimizing a crime because it violates the constitutional right to preserve and promote one's mother tongue which is also considered

### Conclusion

Even though the discourse of linguistic hegemony is contested, government and powerful ideologies contribute to legitimize hegemony of powerful languages through language planning and policy making. This legitimation of powerful languages, especially, Nepali and English, in the context of Nepal is explicitly and implicitly marginalizing minority local language. Drawing on theoretical frameworks and critical analysis of language in education policies, the paper reveals that even though Nepalese language in education policy seems to adopt mother tongue-based multilingual education policy, hegemony of two dominant languages (English and Nepali) is still prevalent. The hegemony of these dominant language is legitimized, reinforced and maintained by the nation through language in education policies. To legitimize the linguistic hegemony, ideologies of the government, politicians and powerful groups and power at different structural level of the state and social strata plays a significant role. The legitimation of linguistic hegemony is marginalizing mother tongues of minority groups and violating, what Phyak (2021) says, constitutional right to speak one's mother tongue. Similarly, its legitimation of hegemony of dominant language continues, it will result into what Skutnaab-Kangas (2005) calls 'linguistic genocide'.

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